



# Some facts about dioxins

## What are dioxins?

'Dioxins' refers to a group of chlorinated chemical compounds that have similar chemical structures, properties and biological characteristics, including toxicity. Although everyone is exposed to very low levels of dioxins in everyday life, at certain levels of exposure, dioxins can be very dangerous.

## Where do dioxins come from?

Dioxins are organic pollutants and can result from natural processes, such as volcanic eruptions and forest fires, as well as industrial processes. Some people have expressed concern that some poorly manufactured, illegal pesticides might contain unsafe levels of dioxins. [According to](#) the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, combustion processes and atmospheric transport are the main cause of dioxins in the environment. It has been estimated that bushfires may contribute at least 20-30 per cent of the total release of dioxin-like compounds to the Australian environment. Cigarette smokers are likely to have higher intakes of dioxins than non-smokers.

## Should I be worried about dioxins?

General exposure of most Australians to dioxins is very low - [lower than most other areas of the world](#). In order to avoid unnecessary exposure, farmers should ensure they are using legitimate, registered products from established, reputable manufacturers and comply with all label instructions, especially those regarding the use of personal protective equipment. [CropLife member companies](#) follow a strict code of conduct that requires commitment to high standards of safety, stewardship and product quality. CropLife members must also comply with the [United Nations International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides](#) and participate in industry stewardship activities including **drumMUSTER**, ChemClear® and Agsafe Accreditation and Training to ensure that the health and environmental risks from unwanted products and empty containers are responsibly managed.

## Are pesticides tested for dioxins?

An independent regulator, the [Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority](#) (APVMA), conducts thorough risk assessments for every chemical product *before* they can be sold or used. These risk assessments require companies to provide a huge amount of data from testing the chemical in a wide variety of conditions before it can be approved for sale. Once a chemical is on the market, any new information on the way it is being used, or its effect on health or the environment must be reported to the APVMA so it can consider whether further restrictions are necessary to protect the community and the environment.

CropLife member companies ensure the quality of their products in a number of ways beyond regulatory requirements. These include state-of-the-art manufacturing processes that minimise production of dioxins and regular tests to ensure products are consistent and of the highest quality. Compliance with the CropLife code of conduct and the [United Nations International Code of Conduct on the Distribution and Use of Pesticides](#) is mandatory for all CropLife member companies, requiring commitment to high standards of safety, stewardship and product quality.

## Are pesticides contaminated with dioxins being sold in Australia?

Products that are registered in Australia are rigorously assessed for safety. However, there is growing evidence that illegal chemicals that haven't been registered in Australia are making their way into the country. There needs to be a crackdown on illegal imported chemicals as these chemicals have not been through the same rigorous testing that chemicals registered in Australia have been through. These illegal imports could potentially cause huge amounts of harm to Australian farmers, the community and the environment.

This reinforces the importance of buying from [a reputable supplier](#).

## What can be done?

Through the [Ag Quality Assurance](#) scheme (AgQA), the APVMA is able to investigate and test whether registered agricultural chemical products are manufactured to an acceptable standard. AgQA should pick up contaminated chemicals and products of substandard quality. There is, however, an issue with resourcing this scheme and CropLife has been advocating for many years for increased government investment in compliance powers for the APVMA.

Ensuring that pesticides do not contain unacceptable levels of dioxins remains a compliance issue for the APVMA, but where dioxin levels within products present an unacceptable risk, CropLife supports appropriate restrictions up to and including product registration cancellation. Dioxin contamination may be caused by poor manufacturing processes. Good manufacturing practice and compliance regimes can and should manage this risk. CropLife member companies follow a strict code of conduct which requires commitment to high standards of safety, stewardship and product quality.